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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, unoffically, summer has arrived. By the looks of the recent weather here in the Northeast, you really wouldn't know it! Occasional rain, and a few days with cooler-than-normal temps haven't given us much to enjoy, but we'll make the best of it!

It's been a "short" week due to the Memorial Day holiday, so trying to get caught up was difficult. But, we managed and things are progressing. Let's get to this week's issue while time is still on our side!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Hacker Hero 'Watch Dogs' To Be Let Loose!
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Worst Video Game Ever?
And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Hacker Hero Video Game 'Watch Dogs' To Be Let Loose

Hacker-themed video game "Watch Dogs" makes its hotly anticipated debut on Tuesday in a world grappling with real-life fears about privacy in the Internet era.

France-based Ubisoft's new title features a protagonist who controls the world around him by hacking into systems and has generated intense buzz

for eerie parallels with the storm about US surveillance.

Games typically use weapons ranging from guns and swords to lasers to special powers to defeat enemies, overcome obstacles or simply score points.

But in "Watch Dogs", the player-controlled antihero can access everything from the cellphone conversations and medical records of passers-by to computers which control traffic lights, to advance through the game.

"We knew we had a relevant topic," Canadian Ubisoft developer Dominic Guay told AFP as the game was previewed at the E3 video game trade show last year.

"I turned on CNN, and the first sentence I heard was ’invasion of privacy,’ switched channels and on Fox they were (talking about) ’surveillance,’ and I said to my creative director, ’Those are all our key words.’"

Set in Chicago, the game centers on Aiden Pearce, who uses his smartphone to access the city’s Central Operating System, which controls everything from power grids and traffic management technology to bank accounts and phone networks.

That kind of hacking evokes the stunning revelations about electronic surveillance by US authorities, revealed by ex-government contractor and whistle-blower Edward Snowden, who is in hiding in Russia.

The documents suggest the US National Security Agency (NSA) has gathered call log records for millions of American phone subscribers and targeted the Internet data of foreign Web users.

The debate was also fueled by interest in putting more surveillance cameras on streets in the aftermath of last year’s deadly Boston marathon bombings.

Ubisoft said the game, originally set for release last year, has seen strong pre-orders, suggesting it will be a big seller.

"The teams have worked tirelessly to ensure that players will enjoy a top quality game with enormous scope, and we can t wait to get the game into their hands," Ubisoft senior vice president of marketing Tony Key said Friday.

Guay said technology is now making it possible to foresee a world not unlike that in British writer George Orwell’s novel "1984," in which Big Brother watches and controls everything.

Orwell "had an extreme view of that dystopian world at that time," he said. "I think we’re seeing a time where the technology has caught up to his views" where the technology would enable his dystopian world to exist.

In "Watch Dogs," Pearce starts off seeking revenge for a loved one, but as he finds out more about the city, through hacking into its systems and inhabitants, he becomes a "vigilante," according to Montreal-based Guay.

"Most of the hacks that we have in the game are based on stuff that’s happened in the real world," Guay said.

"We just happened to give them all to a single player."

He pointed out the rise of "smart cities" in which traffic, utilities and other systems are optimized by centralized computing networks.

Guay was adamant that the game makes no value judgment on the complex and sensitive issue.

"We’re not trying to be moralistic about it," he said.

"But we’re hoping that players, when they’ve finished the game, maybe start a conversation," he added.

Versions of "Watch Dogs" have been tailored for play on Sony’s new-generation PlayStation 4 and Microsoft’s Xbox One as well as the previous generation of those consoles.

The game, priced at $60 in the US, can also be played on computers powered by Windows software.

Ubisoft added the ability for people playing "Watch Dogs" on consoles to take on in-game challenges from friends using a companion application on smartphones or tablets.

Mario Kart 8 Races to the Front of the Wii U Pack

It s a little rough out there for Wii U owners these days, but good news is skidding around the corner.

Releasing May 30, Mario Kart 8 is more than just a great video game. It s a must-have racer, a celebration of Nintendo s prowess as a game maker, a system-seller, and a bright beacon in a blue ocean of uncertainty for the underselling Wii U.

You know the drill: Pick a mascot, pick a kart, pick a track, and powerslide (and power-up) your way to victory. That core remains unchanged, though Nintendo offers a surprising amount of customization. Thirty playable characters the most in the series boast different overall ratings, but so does each kart body, wheel type, and glider style. Tinkering with these keeps the game chugging well past its first few hours and offers a reward beyond the gameplay itself.

Not that it needs it, because the game handles like a dream. The powersliding, the perfectly timed green shell, the photo finish it s all here, and it s all dialed in. It s hard to quantify exactly what makes Mario Kart 8 so eminently playable, but I think it s all about the intangibles: the way one kart controls compared with another; the tension between holding onto a powerslide for a little extra juice or letting it go to get a better angle out of a turn; the incidental animations as characters glare at one another while jockeying for position. Mario Kart 8 is Nintendo cooking with love, and it shows around every turn.

Making it around those turns in one piece is easier said than done thanks to those pesky, game-changing power-ups. The classic bananas, shells, and mushrooms are here, joined by a few cool new items, like a super-powered horn that can actually stop that accursed blue shell from ruining your first-place finish. It s still a game occasionally dominated by luck of the power-up draw, though, and the chances of you landing that super horn

right when you need it are pretty slim. No game snatches defeat from the jaws of victory quite like Mario Kart.

It s frustrating zipping from first to fifth courtesy of a well-timed blue shell, for sure, but the game s 32 tracks are filled with enough shortcuts and secrets that you ll probably (and, in a sense, rightfully) blame yourself instead of the power-ups. Half of those tracks are brand-new, while the rest are rejiggered remakes from older games in the franchise. At times, these are spectacular. Tearing a kart through a volcanic Bowser s Castle, racers come face to face with a gigantic, Godzilla-like Bowser rippling the track with his monstrous fists. It s awesome.

The tracks also hold Mario Kart 8 s most notable new feature: anti-gravity. Occasionally your kart turns into a magnetic hoverboard tethered to the track, flipped upside-down or, more interestingly, on its side. It s a nice touch but doesn t add much to the gameplay. Players get small boosts for banging into one another during these bits, but after a time the anti-grav sections sort of fly by without your even realizing it.

But what Mario Kart 8 lacks in innovation, it more than makes up for with its jaw-dropping looks. So much is made of the Wii U s power shortage relative to the Xbox One and PS4, but you wouldn t know it here. This is a gorgeous video game. Skidding around corners, tossing out power-ups, hitting a jump and gliding through the air Mario Kart 8 is a Technicolor roller coaster absolutely bursting at the seams with creative flair, trumping last year s superb Super Mario 3D World as the best-looking game on the system.

Despite the Wii U s notorious online shortcomings, playing online actually works just fine though, curiously, chat functionality is disabled during races. Presumably this is intended to cut down on the smack talk, and while that s appreciated for random public matches, it sort of ruins the fun of giving your friends hell after thwacking the back of their head with a green shell. Of course, you can always invite them over and play face to face, as Mario intended. You can also share highlight-reel videos to both the Nintendo Miiverse and YouTube. It might not rival the streaming goodness of Twitch, but come on, baby steps.

In terms of content and delivery, Mario Kart 8 is easily among the best in the franchise. And while it isn t likely to be anywhere near the top of the heap in terms of units sold due to the relatively paltry Wii U install base (Polygon illustrates this nicely), but perhaps it s got a higher calling. Great games sell systems, and make no mistake: This is a flat-out great video game. There s hope yet for the Wii U.

4.5/5 stars

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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New Mexico City Working On Who Gets Atari Games

Officials in a New Mexico city are working on a plan under which film companies, museums and the public could get Atari video games that were dug up from an old landfill last month.

Workers for a documentary film production company recovered the games from the garbage heap in Alamogordo.

According to the Alamogordo Daily News (http://bit.ly/1izntyG), city documents indicate Atari consoles and 1,377 games were found, including "E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial."

The search for the "E.T." cartridges will be featured in an upcoming documentary about the biggest video game company of the early ’80s. The game contributed to Atari’s demise.

A draft plan being considered by Alamogordo officials would provide some of the games to the companies that paid for the excavation. Some would go to national, state and local museums, while hundreds could be sold to the public.

Worst Video Game Ever?

Howard Scott Warshaw is the creator of E.T. - The Extraterrestrial for Atari in 1982.

That makes him the man who took one of the most successful movies of all time and turned it into what many consider the worst video game ever. Critics savaged the game. Millions of copies went unsold or were returned. It s considered one of the most epic failures in the industry’s history.

And Warshaw is remarkably OK with that. I really do prefer people identify it that way because I also did Yar s Revenge and that s frequently cited as one of the best games in history. So between those two games I have the greatest range of any designer in history, he jokes.

Warshaw says Atari only gave him five and a half weeks to create the game in time for that year s Christmas season. He s proud it got made at all. It s still to this date 30 years later, I believe, the fastest video game ever developed in history, he points out.

Warshaw also points out that, despite not meeting expectations, E.T. for the Atari still sold a million and a half units. So they managed to turn a million and a half-seller into a loser.

The fate of E.T. for the Atari has become an industry legend. It was rumoured the company even went so far as to bury millions of copies in an unknown location just to be rid of them. That rumour was proven true in April when searchers dug up copies in the New Mexico desert . Howard Scott Warshaw was there.

Atari has long since been out of business but Warshaw is thriving. He was a keynote speaker at the Ottawa International Game Conference where he spoke on, what else, how to deal with failure. The message I bring

typically is stay inspired, stay passionate, and be resilient.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

eBay Thought User Data Was Safe

EBay initially thought that user data was safe following the security breach it fell victim to recently. As it turns out, that wasn t the case at all; as Reuters noted in a recent report, eBay has now confirmed that personal data belonging to all 145 million of its users was accessed and compromised in the attack, making it one of the biggest breaches of all time.

In other words, change your eBay password immediately if you haven t already.

Reuters says that eBay initially thought all user data was safe from attackers in the breach, but an eBay executive confirmed that wasn t the case while speaking with Reuters in what were the company s first public comments from a top exec since the breach.

For a very long period of time we did not believe that there was any eBay customer data compromised, eBay global marketplaces chief Devin Wenig told the news organization. Once the company learned that data was compromised, the executive says eBay moved quickly to disclose the breach.

According to Wenig, email addresses and encrypted passwords for all 145 million eBay users were compromised. It is unclear if or when hackers will be able to break the encryption protecting the passwords, but users should obviously change their passwords anyway as a precaution.

Wenig said millions of eBay users have already changed their passwords, though he failed to elaborate. The executive also said that eBay is taking measures to protect its network in order to ensure that a similar breach does not happen again in the future.

Google Takes Steps To Comply With EU's 'Right To Be Forgotten' Ruling

Google has taken the first steps to meet a European ruling that citizens can have objectionable links removed from Internet search results, a ruling that pleased privacy campaigners but raised fears that the right can be abused to hide negative information.

The balance between privacy and the freedom of information has been a hot topic in Europe, whose citizens enjoy some of the world's strictest data protection laws, especially after last year's revelations about the

extensive global surveillance programs run by the United States.

Google, which processes more than 90 percent of all Web searches in Europe, said on Thursday that it had made available a webform through which people can submit their requests, but did not say how soon it would remove links that meet the criteria for being taken down.

The move by the world’s most popular search engine comes just before a two-day meeting of heads of the 28 EU data protection agencies from Tuesday, during which they are due to discuss the implications of the EU ruling on May 13.

"It was about time, since European data protection laws have existed since 1995," said Viviane Reding, the EU’s justice commissioner. "We will now need to look into how the announced tool will work in practice."

Google GOOGL.O said it has convened a committee of senior Google executives and independent experts to try and craft a long-term approach to dealing with what’s expected to be a barrage of requests from the EU’s 500 million citizens.

"The court’s ruling requires Google to make difficult judgements about an individual’s right to be forgotten and the public’s right to know," a Google spokesman said.

The decision by the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ) places Google in a tricky position as it strives to interpret the EU’s broad criteria for "inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant" information.

Advocates of freedom of speech have said that the ruling paved the way for rich or powerful individuals and criminals to remove information about them, a claim that is dismissed by privacy activists since the ECJ allowed Google to apply a public interest test in deciding whether to remove the links.

"What today’s Google application form does is demonstrate the fallacy behind the frequent complaint that compliance with EU laws is too cumbersome," said a spokesman for Europe’s consumer digital rights lobby group BEUC.

"There is a major difference between applying and being granted a right to deletion of personal data."

When evaluating requests, Google says it will consider whether the results include outdated information about a person, as well as whether there is a public interest in the information, such as in cases of professional malpractice, criminal convictions and the public conduct of officials.

Since the ECJ’s ruling, Google has received thousands of removal requests, according to a person familiar with the situation.

Failure to remove links that meet the EU’s criteria can result in fines.

Google has said it is disappointed with the EU ruling, and Executive Chairman Eric Schmidt said the balance the court struck between privacy and "the right to know" was wrong.

On Thursday, Google said it would work with data protection authorities and others as it implements the ruling.

It is not clear when Google will begin to actually remove any links, and the ruling does not mean that information itself must be taken down, just the link in search results.

Yahoo Inc, which also operates a search engine in Europe, has previously said it is "carefully reviewing" the decision to assess the impact for its business and its users. Microsoft, which operates the Bing search engine, has previously declined to comment on the ruling.

Extortion Malware ’Creator’ Pleads Not Guilty in U.S.

A Swedish man allegedly behind a malware program designed to help hackers extort money after taking control of computers pleaded not guilty Thursday in US court.

Alex Yucel, 24, was arrested in Moldova in November. He stands accused of co-creating RAT malware and owning and operating the BlackShades group that sold it.

He entered his plea before a federal judge in Manhattan after being extradited to the United States.

He faces two counts of computer hacking, one count of conspiring to commit access device fraud, one count of access device fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft.

If convicted, Yucel faces up to 17 years in prison.

Nearly 100 people were arrested in Europe and the United States in a bust targeting the creators, sellers and users of the malware in 16 countries, authorities announced in May.

The program, dubbed RAT for "Remote Access Tools," allowed hackers to access private photographs, passwords, spy on victims through webcams, lock data and then send out "ransom notes" to extort money.

The RAT program could also harass or frighten victims through messages that computers would read aloud, and in some cases, it gave hackers access to webcams to spy inside private homes.

The program generated sales of $350,000 between September 2010 and April 2014, with more than 6,000 customer accounts in more than 100 countries, according to the FBI.

It was sold to hackers for $40 each.

More than 500,000 computers were infected, according to US Attorney Preet Bharara.

Apple Device Hijacking Spreads to US as Aussies Urged To Change Passwords

Apple device owners who have iCloud accounts are being told to change their passwords by Australian authorities in the wake of a hijacking attack that appears to have spread to the US.

The Australian government’s Stay Smart Online service and the NSW Police have both issued warnings to Apple users, which state that as a precaution they should change their passwords.

"With the possibility that this attack is linked to your ’Apple ID’, affected users are advised to change [their] Apple ID password as soon as possible," Stay Smart Online wrote in an advisory. "Users not affected may also consider changing their Apple ID password as a precaution."

Apple says users should not use the same username and password across multiple online accounts.

"The best course of action is to change your Apple ID password ASAP," NSW Police said.

Meanwhile, Apple issued a statement to Fairfax Media on Wednesday stating its iCloud service had not been compromised, but that impacted users should "change their Apple ID password as soon as possible and avoid using the same username and password for multiple services".

Any users who needed additional help were advised to contact AppleCare or visit an Apple store.

The attacks, which were initially only impacting device owners in Australia, involve a hacker logging in to Apple iCloud accounts and using the lost device feature to lock users out. A message then demands a ransom of between $US50 and $US100 for the device to be unlocked.

If a passcode was set on the device - be it an iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch or Mac - the user could simply enter it, change their iCloud password and avoid having to deal with the ransom. But if no passcode was set, Apple device owners reported having to erase their entire phone or device. If a back-up existed, this could then be used to restore it to when it was last backed up.

The issue appears to stem from the hacker making use of credentials from a previous data breach on an unknown company. Apple’s statement alludes to this - by stating that customers should use different passwords across their online accounts - but does not confirm it.

As is often the case after a data breach, hackers sift through the data looking for information they can use to break into users’ other online accounts. And because users often use the same password across multiple online accounts and don’t change them, hackers can often get in.

Up until the last few days, the majority of attacked devices were reported to be in Australia, but according to Apple s support thread, a number of victims have began being attacked in the US.

"I’m in the US. Never been to Australia. Hacked last night ," one user wrote.

"Currently restoring to try and get back online," they added.

Former Victoria Police superintendent Tony Warren was one of the higher-profile targets hit. He told Fairfax Radio he was startled in the middle of the night by the hackers infiltrating his iPad.

"Basically the message was that I had been hacked by Oleg Pliss, was the

name given, to contact him on a telephone number... and pay $50 to unlock my iPhone and iPad," Warren said.

It is likely hackers are using the unusual name as a front to get money from people. A real Oleg Pliss is a software engineer at tech company Oracle.

Contacted by Fairfax, Mr Pliss said he was not a hacker.

"I have never hacked any Apple device," he said.

"I am not aware that my name is being used. But there could be other person with the same name."

A similar name is listed on LinkedIN as a banking professional in Ukraine, while there are others in Russia.

Sydney Apple user Susan Walker told Fairfax she lost everything on her iPhone due to the hijacking.

"As I did not have a password on my phone the phone was blocked [from being used]," she said.

"I spent [Wednesday] at the Apple Genius bar having my phone reinstalled. All information (outside my iTunes backup) was lost. I now have a password installed on my iPhone!

"It was awful!"

She said the Castle Hill Apple store she went to "knew nothing" about the issue.

"At no point did I consider paying this scum!" she added, referring to the hacker.

Jayne Cho, an Australian living in South Korea, said her iPhone and iPad was targeted.

"I was woken at 2am with both my iPhone and iPad screaming an alarm and presenting the message about the device being hacked by Oleg Pliss," she said.

Peta Santoro in Perth was one of the luckier ones who had a passcode set on his device, meaning that he could ignore the hacker’s message just by logging in with his passcode.

"My iPhone was protected with a passcode so I was one of the people who were able to still unlock their phones," he said. "My password was one which I used across a number of different websites so I’ve learnt my lesson and will be allocating different passwords to everything."

When contacted, Australia’s three big telcos - Telstra, Vodafone and Optus - referred the matter to Apple. Telstra was the only one to acknowledge the issue in a statement to Fairfax.

"We’re aware of the reports and we ve referred the matter to Apple," Telstra said.

"In the meantime customers who need assistance can contact AppleCare."

In addition to changing passwords, IT security experts have recommended Apple users enable "two-factor authentication" on their accounts if they don’t already have it by visiting:http://support.apple.com/kb/ht5570. This acts as a second layer of security by making users have to enter a code that is sent to their mobile device before they are granted access to their account.

How to change your Apple ID/iCloud password:

Go to My Apple ID (appleid.apple.com).
Click "Manage your Apple ID" and sign in.
If you have two-step verification turned on, you’ll be asked to send a verification code to the trusted device associated with your Apple ID. If you’re unable to receive messages at your trusted device, follow the guidelines for what to do if you can’t sign in with two-step verification.
Click "Password and Security".
In the "Choose a new password" section, click Change Password.
Enter your old password, then enter a new password and confirm the new password. Click Save when done.

Iran Judge Summons Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg to Court

A judge in southern Iran has ordered Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg to appear in court to answer complaints by individuals who say Facebook-owned applications Instagram and WhatsApp violate their privacy, semiofficial news agency ISNA reported Tuesday.

It quoted Ruhollah Momen Nasab, an official with the paramilitary Basij force, as saying that the judge also ordered the two apps blocked. It is highly unlikely that Zuckerberg would appear in an Iranian court, since there is no extradition treaty between Iran and the United States. Some Iranian courts have in recent years issued similar rulings that could not be carried out.

Another Iranian court last week had ordered Instagram blocked over privacy concerns. However, users in the capital, Tehran, still could access both applications around noon Tuesday. In Iran, websites and Internet applications have sometimes been reported blocked but remained operational.

Facebook is already officially banned in the country, along with other social websites like Twitter and YouTube, as well as their mobile apps. However, some senior leaders like Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif are active on Twitter, and many Iranians use proxy servers to access banned websites and applications.

The administration of moderate President Hassan Rouhani is opposed to blocking such websites before authorities create local alternatives. Social media has offered a new way for him and his administration to reach out to the West as it negotiates with world powers over the country s contested nuclear program.

We should see the cyber world as an opportunity, Rouhani said last week, according to the official IRNA news agency. Why are we so shaky? Why don t we trust our youth?

Hard-liners, meanwhile, accuse Rouhani of failing to stop the spread of what they deem as decadent Western culture in Iran.

Surface Pro 3 Vs. World: Mobile Smackdown

Surface Pro 3: The tablet that can replace a laptop?? Microsoft touts the Surface Pro 3 as the tablet that can replace a laptop. The company said the same thing about earlier Surface Pro models, none of which sold well enough to justify the claim. But thanks to a bigger screen and other improvements, the Pro 3 largely lives up to its billing.

Earlier Surfaces are interesting as small laptops, but with a 10.6-inch screen, cramped keyboard accessory, and limited kickstand, the Pro and Pro 2 were ultimately too small. As tablets, the devices handled awkwardly, hampered by their relative heaviness and landscape-centric 16:9 shape. The Surface Pro 3 corrects these problems. It has the screen real estate of a legitimate laptop, and though heavier than pure tablets at 1.76 pounds, it’s lighter and thinner than earlier models. In fact, the Pro 3, though not as light and ergonomic as an iPad, is surprisingly easy to hold for long periods, thanks to its unique 3:2 aspect ratio.

The Pro 3’s included Surface Pro Pen adds a superlative stylus experience to the mix. Out of the box, it offers a deeply integrated experience in apps such as OneNote and Fresh Paint, and will soon boast optimized third-party apps from major vendors such as Adobe. Using the pen isn’t quite like applying ink to paper, but it comes close - close enough for electronic notes and drawings to feel second nature after only a little practice.

The Surface Pro 3 is a terrific device, but it’s still not an optimal choice for everyone. When he introduced the Pro 3, Microsoft corporate VP Panos Panay repeatedly compared it to both an iPad and a MacBook Air, arguing that it can replace both. He’s right; the Surface Pro 3 can serve as a user’s sole laptop and sole tablet - but that doesn’t necessarily mean it should.

If you’re looking for a pure tablet experience, the Surface Pro 3 isn’t as mobile, light, or easy to hold as an iPad, and it costs a hell of a lot more than the vast majority of Android and Windows slates. Then again, the newest Pro is one of the few tablets to effectively integrate a pen into the experience.

As a laptop, it’s a topflight device, but arguably less befitting a "Pro" moniker than Apple’s MacBook Pros, which are heavier but offer more raw power. The MacBook Air is a better comparison. It lacks the Pro 3’s touchscreen hybridity, but as a conventional laptop, it’s hard to beat and a big reason why Macs traditionally rule the market for $1000+ PCs. Its new kickstand allows the Pro 3 to sit on your lap better than its predecessors, but it still requires some fiddling to get going. More conventional designs such as the Air’s require less fuss.

Even if you’re a fan of 2-in-1 designs, the Pro 3 might be too pricey for what it offers. Few Windows hybrids are more complete and compelling, and fewer still can match the Surface Pro 3’s luxurious build quality. But these perks will matter more to some users than to others, and if your basic goal is to squeeze a laptop and tablet into one device, there are cheaper ways to do so.

Ultimately, how much you get from the Surface Pro 3 depends how you use it. The device resists comparisons because it is fairly unique, but also invites comparisons because it includes elements found in other devices. Is it as good a laptop as the MacBook Air? As productive a tablet as the Galaxy Note Pro? A better hybrid than other Windows slates? Do you get more for $800 from an iPad Air or a Surface Pro 3?

If your requirements fall within the Pro 3's strengths, it's an outstanding option. But if you're not motivated by the device's unique combination of traits, you might prefer to keep your laptops and tablets separate. And even if you like hybrids, the Pro 3 is one of the pricier ways to go. Is it the right device for you? Explore this slideshow to see how the Surface Pro 3 compares to some of its main alternatives. And share your opinions in the comments field.

YouTube Reveals Which US Internet Providers Are Best and Worst at Streaming

Starting today, internet providers in the United States will finally be held to account for lackluster YouTube streaming speeds. Google has brought its Video Quality Report first launched in Canada at the start of this year to the US, and is now ranking ISPs like Cablevision and Verizon FiOS based on the fidelity of their YouTube streams. If you've been experiencing buffering issues or playback interruptions despite paying for a speedy internet connection, this monthly report could help answer the lingering question of why.

"Making sure you can watch YouTube in HD from anywhere, anytime is a shared effort among us, your Internet service provider and even you," the company says. On that last point, Google is offering consumers a number of tips to help boost YouTube performance. That's assuming of course that your chosen ISP and YouTube are on good, cooperative terms. But we're in a different world now. And as Netflix has shown (more than once), ensuring smooth streaming sometimes means pulling out the checkbook.

You'll know which ISPs are faring best because they're labeled as "HD Verified." This means that customers can expect reliable streams of at least 720p; apparently setting the bar at 1080p was too great of a challenge for these companies to meet. More specifics on the methodology YouTube's using to grade ISPs can be found here.

If you can only successfully watch videos at a resolution of 360p, your ISP is offering what YouTube describes as standard definition. But some internet providers are apparently doing even worse than that; the worst designation of "lower definition" is reserved for ISPs plagued by stuttering video and buffering even when you're trying to watch something at less than 360p quality. The Video Quality Report also lends an interesting look at what time of day YouTube is most popular with other people on your network and in your city. Surprise: many people use it to waste time at work.

Ten Terrible Tech Annoyances That Should Be Illegal

Today s technology is astonishing, magical, and delightful. It can also be annoying beyond belief. How many times have you yelled, There oughta be a law! at a product or website, wondering who in their right mind could have released a certain feature into the world?

And you re right. There oughta.

Someday, the editors of Yahoo Tech will rule the world. And we will work swiftly to enact laws that fix the most annoying things in technology:

1. CAPTCHAs shall be banned? They are readability roadblocks on websites. They re supposed to prevent automated spammer software from signing up for fake accounts, but it s a losing game. Computers are getting smarter all the time. Humans are not. In order to make CAPTCHAs too hard for computers to read, they ve had to become too hard for humans to decipher. It s time for them to go.

2. Hold music and the right of silence?If you have to wait on the phone to talk to a person or a machine, why should you be subjected to awful music? We decree that there shall be an option for silence, maybe with a periodic, quiet update that you re still on hold. You know, so that you can actually focus on something else instead of having some horrible din blasting in your ear.

3. Proprietary power bricks: Illegal?We now have several devices per person, and it s nearly impossible to keep them all paired up with the power adapters they came with.

From now on, all small electronic gizmos shall be powered by USB cables, so you can charge them either from your computer or with a ubiquitous USB power plug adaptor.

In fact, in Europe, there s already a common charger law. Progress!

Let s bring that law to the United States and extend it to all small electronics, not just mobiles.

(By the way, it s too bad Apple s Lightning connector is proprietary, since it provides a better user experience than micro USB, but perhaps when USB Type C comes out, Lightning will finally have a worthwhile competitor.)

4. Printer ink to get consumer advisory labels?The most expensive liquid you can buy is not gasoline, champagne, or even fancy perfume. It s inkjet printer ink, packaged into a little disposable printhead. It works out to about $8,000 a gallon.

Those absurd prices drive the retail costs of printers down to the toy category. But people should know what they re in for. From now on, printer advertisements shall include estimated yearly ink cartridge costs, just as refrigerator labels come with yearly energy costs. And printer ink cartridges shall be sold on a dollars-per-ounce basis, so we re all aware of what we re spending money on.

5. No voice-response double jeopardy?An automated telephone system asks you to enter your name, account number, or other information. OK, fine. Then why, once we re transferred to a human operator, must we be asked for the same information again?

It won t happen in the Yahoo Tech future. That practice will be outlawed

6. Alerts must know their place?Our sanity is more important than a random notification or alert from our technology. Monitor status messages shall be designed so they don t block login windows. Appliances like microwaves and dishwashers shall not beep constantly about minor issues, like their cycles being done (once or twice is enough), or their doors being closed.

I want to log in to my computer, not get some unnecessary information about the monitor s refresh rate.

7. Non-removable batteries: Banned?A technology product can last nearly indefinitely, but a chemical battery (at least today) has a limited lifespan. Once you start using a product with a lithium-ion battery, it starts to degrade. To keep the product from becoming obsolete before you re done with it, batteries shall be easily replaceable.

We are not tyrants, though. We will not decree that all batteries must be under cheeseball snap-on covers. Just that a normal human, with a standard tool (maybe a jeweler s screwdriver), will be able to replace a device s batteries without requiring a technical degree or a trip to an Apple Store.

8. Software updates shall only update?When a software product tries to update itself, it shall do that and only that. An update process shall not be used to download and install a third-party app. We ll call this the Don t Ask law, after the Ask toolbar ride-along install that often comes along with Java or Adobe Flash updates.

9. Pasted text must default to no formatting ?If you copy text from a website and want to paste it into an email or another document, you get mismatched formatting.

Henceforth, pasted text shall inherit the formatting of the document into which it is being pasted, unless the paster holds down some special option key to override that behavior. The way copy/paste works now is the reverse of common sense.

10. No more long ads before video content?The maximum length of a pre-roll ad (the commercial that plays before a video online) shall be at most 15 percent the length of the video itself. No more 30-second advertisements in front of 17-second videos.

Advertising makes free videos possible, of course, so we won t decree it out of existence. But keeping the ad-to-content ratio reasonable should keep readers and viewers more engaged, and as a byproduct lead to snappier ads.

And while we re at it, we might also ban auto-play videos (video streams that start up immediately when you click a webpage). Like the one on this page itself. Come visit us in jail.

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